

# **Recreation**

## **The Preferred Alternative for Recreation on the NHAL State Forest**

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See Maps 1-5 for recreation issues.

# Overview of Recreation Proposals

- **Camping** changes and expansions (pages 8-10) include:
  - Firefly Lake, Clear Lake, Buffalo Lake, Cunard Lake, East Star Lake, Razorback Lake, and Upper Gresham Lake campgrounds would be expanded to meet growing demand for rustic and modern camping.
  - A new group campground would be developed on Buffalo Lake.
  - New canoe, wilderness, and backpack campsites would be developed.
  - Carrol Lake campground would be moved across the lake. The new Carrol Lake campground would be a modern, 50-site campground.
- Changes are proposed for **wild, wilderness, electric-only, and public non-motor lakes**. Currently there are 19 wilderness lakes and 41 wild lakes. The Preferred Alternative proposes 8 wilderness lakes and 45 wild lakes. The differences are due to changes in designations and to existing uses. (page 11, Appendix A)
- **Swimming, fishing, hunting, and trapping** opportunities would continue to be abundant on the NHAL. (pages 10 and 14)
- One new 8-mile **ATV trail** is proposed, pending assessment of feasibility. (page 12)
- One new **mountain bike trail** would be developed. The Escanaba and Raven trails would be closed to mountain bikes due to erosion concerns. A new **paved biking trail** would be developed in the Crystal-Muskie Campground. (page 12-13)
- One new **hiking trail** is proposed around Clear Lake. A new **backpacking trail** is proposed in northern Vilas County. (page 13)
- **Horseback riding** opportunities would continue to be abundant on the NHAL. (page 13)
- No change is proposed for **cross country ski trails**. Some trails would be designated and promoted for **snowshoeing**. (page 13)
- **Snowmobile trails** would have *no-net-reduction* in mileage. A small two-mile reroute is proposed around the Bittersweet Lakes area. (page 14)
- No change is proposed for the use of street licensed **motor vehicles on woods roads** within the NHAL. (page 14)
- **Education and interpretation** programs would be expanded to include: (page 15)
  - A new forestry awareness and education center, with adjacent nature and disabled access trails.
  - Rustic outdoor seating at the Crystal-Muskie Nature Center.
  - A new 1 mile nature trail with a disabled access loop at Crystal Lake.
  - A new summer use interpretive shelter in the Clear Lake Campground.
- Changes to **Semi-Remote, Non-Motor, and Wild Resources Recreation Areas** (pages 15-17):
  - The Manitowish Wilderness Area would be redesignated the Manitowish Wild Resources Area.
  - The Frank Lake and Partridge-Nixon Lake Wild Areas would be redesignated the Frank Lake and Nixon Lake Semi-Remote Recreation Areas with new boundaries. These areas would continue to provide somewhat remote recreation. The former Wild Areas would be managed according to the ecological objectives of the areas they fall into. (See page 27 for land management issues.)
  - The Indian Creek Wild Area would no longer have a recreation designation due to the low recreation opportunity, but the area would continue to provide a somewhat remote experience.
  - New Bittersweet Lakes Non-Motor Area would provide a place for quiet, scenic recreation. (page 17)

# Recreation Proposals

Recreation on the NHAL is important to many people. Visitors have been coming to the NHAL for generations, and those who vacation or live near the forest know the beauty of its lakes and streams, diversity of trails and campgrounds, and extent of its forests. The recreation proposals under the Preferred Alternative meet the Property Goal (page 4) of providing a variety of recreational settings and activities, ranging from primitive to developed, consistent with resource capabilities. The Preferred Alternative strives to maintain the general balance of existing uses and experiences currently provided by the NHAL in its traditional recreation niche and proposes modest expansions in several areas. Proposed changes in recreation management include a potential new ATV trail, several new or expanded campgrounds, changes in remote recreation areas, mountain bike trails, and generator use at campgrounds, and a new forestry awareness and education center.

In January, 2002 a range of alternatives on recreation was presented to the public. Public input on these alternatives, along with the property's designation as a state forest, the NHAL vision and goals, the Recreational Supply and Demand Assessment, the Regional Analysis, and the property staff's extensive management experience, contributed to the recreation direction outlined here in the Preferred Alternative.

Traditional uses such as hunting, fishing, trapping, walking, nature study, and berry picking will be available on the NHAL regardless of the master plan's decisions. Most other types of recreational uses, however, will be available as specified by the master plan. Across the NHAL, the State Forest Superintendent has the authority to make reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. Construction of facilities will follow guidelines set forth within the Americans with Disabilities Act. Recreational developments will be designed to reduce their impact to the natural resources of the NHAL.

## Camping

The NHAL provides a variety of rustic, modern, and backcountry campsites. The NHAL currently offers 18 family campgrounds with approximately 900 campsites, plus two outdoor group campgrounds that can accommodate a total of 100 people. Most of the NHAL's campgrounds are small. Just over one third of the NHAL's campsites (349 sites in four campgrounds) are served by showers and flush toilets, but not electric hook-ups. The remaining campgrounds are rustic style with only the basic amenities, such as hand-pumps for water and pit toilets. Five campgrounds offer special facilities for disabled campers, including several sites with electricity. In addition to campgrounds, 131 remote canoe and wilderness (backcountry) campsites are scattered across the NHAL for people wanting less social, more primitive camping. The NHAL also allows backcountry camping along trails by permit. Hunter camping is available in the traditional deer gun season.

The demand for camping on the NHAL is high. Many campgrounds are full almost all summer long, including Crystal-Muskie, Clear Lake, and Firefly Lake, which have flush toilets and showers, and Indian Mounds and Carroll Lake, which are close to Minocqua-Woodruff. Space is often available somewhere in the fourteen rustic family campgrounds, but most rustic campgrounds fill up quickly as well, particularly on weekends. Canoe and backpack sites are also highly sought after. Because campgrounds are full and demand is expected to continue to grow, the Preferred Alternative proposes some increases in camping opportunities. The traditional recreational niche of the NHAL is to provide rustic campgrounds, backcountry campsites, and some modern non-electric campgrounds. The Preferred Alternative continues to develop recreational facilities within this

What's the difference between rustic, modern, and backcountry sites?

**Rustic campgrounds** – 75 sites or less, with pit toilets and hand pump water (no flush toilets or showers)

**Modern campgrounds** – 75 sites or more, with flush toilets and showers

**Backcountry campsites** – single, remote campsites, usually walk-in or canoe-in.

Three types of sites fall within this category: *wilderness, canoe, and backpacking* campsites. Canoe and backpack campsites are free and limited to one night only. Wilderness sites can be reserved in advance and have a fee. In addition, backcountry camping without a designated site is allowed along the Lumber-jack trail by permit only.

niche. While not offered on the NHAL, developed sites with electricity are abundant in the area through private providers. (NHAL Regional Analysis, 2002)



The plan proposes net increases in modern, rustic, and backcountry camping opportunities. The changes would be accomplished over the next 15-20 years to accommodate existing and anticipated future demand. There would be a gain of 150 modern family campsites with showers and flush toilets, a gain of 105 new rustic family campsites, a loss of 19 rustic family campsites, one new group campground, and new canoe, backpack, and wilderness campsites. The two existing group campgrounds in Vilas County are typically full throughout the summer, so a new rustic group campground is proposed in Oneida County. While Carrol Lake campground is very popular, it is boxed in between the lakeshore and the highway, which can be noisy. Therefore the Carrol Lake campground would be moved across the lake and the existing campground would become a day use area.

	Number of Existing Sites	New Proposed Sites	Type of Camping Facility
<b>Family Campgrounds:</b>			
Big Lake	72		Rustic
Big Muskellunge Lake	81		Modern
Buffalo Lake	52	<b>18</b>	Rustic
Carrol Lake – <i>remove existing sites but keep boat landing and create new swimming area</i>	<b>19</b>		Rustic
Carrol Lake – <i>develop sites at new location on the lake</i>		<b>50</b>	Modern
Clear Lake	101	<b>50</b>	Modern
Crystal Lake	100		Modern
Cunard Lake	33	<b>17</b>	Rustic
East Star Lake	30	<b>20</b>	Rustic
Firefly Lake	70	<b>50</b>	Modern
Indian Mounds Area	39		Rustic
North Trout Lake	48		Rustic
Plum Lake	18		Rustic
Razorback Lake	55	<b>20</b>	Rustic
Sandy Beach Lake	37		Rustic
South Trout Lake	24		Rustic
Starrett Lake	46		Rustic
Upper Gresham Lake	27	<b>30</b>	Rustic
West Star Lake	18		Rustic
<b>Group Campgrounds:</b>			
Buffalo Lake - North Shore		<b>50</b>	Rustic
Jag Lake	50		Rustic
North Muskellunge	50		Rustic
<b>Canoe Campsites:</b>	118	<b>10</b>	Backcountry
<b>Wilderness Campsites:</b>	12	<b>10</b>	Backcountry
<b>Backpack Campsites:</b>	0	<b>7-10</b>	Backcountry

See previous page for definitions of rustic, modern, and backcountry sites.

Across the NHAL, some existing sites would be moved or other adjustments made to meet new standards for greater separation distances between campsites. Disabled access campsites with electrical hook-ups for disabled users would be provided at the modern campgrounds. New backpacking campsites are described under hiking and backpacking trails (page 13).

Generators are currently allowed by permit in rustic and modern campgrounds. Under the Preferred Alternative, generators would continue to be allowed by permit in modern campgrounds, but would not be permitted in rustic campgrounds except as needed for people with disabilities.

The proposed expansion of the NHAL boundary north to the border with Michigan could allow for the future development of wilderness campsites, canoe campsites, and a new rustic family campground. Additionally, if camping demand increases, the NHAL would have the option of opening a new loop in the existing Sandy Beach campground in Iron County.

#### **Picnic Areas:**

The Preferred Alternative proposes one new picnic and day use area at the existing Carrol Lake campground. No changes are proposed for the eight existing developed picnic areas.

## **Water-based Recreation**

Water recreation is a primary drawing card for the NHAL, with 900 lakes and many streams within the forest boundary. Because of the pitted outwash landform, the NHAL has one of the highest densities of lakes in the world. The lakes of the NHAL define the recreational experience of many visitors and local residents. The master plan's focus on water relates primarily to access sites because on-the-water operation of watercraft, including jet skis, is mainly under the control of local governments rather than the state.

#### **Boating and Canoeing:**

More than 100 designated boat launch sites are maintained in the NHAL. The boat access sites range from fully developed, paved sites (66) to unpaved sites (37) to carry-in landings on more remote lakes (23). The Preferred Alternative proposes that all developed boat launch sites be retained. In the Preferred Alternative, an additional landing would be built to serve the proposed new campground on the east side of Carrol Lake. Boating and canoeing access to most lakes would remain unchanged in the Preferred Alternative. Changes are proposed to some lakes in the section below on Wild, Wilderness, Public Non-Motor, and Electric-Only lakes designations.

Canoe routes with portages between lakes would be maintained under the Preferred Alternative.

#### **Fishing:**

The master plan addresses fishing opportunities on the NHAL primarily by providing water access to anglers. Fishing piers would continue to be provided. Several disabled-access piers are maintained. Fishing regulations are outside the scope of the master plan. The plowing of town roads for ice fishing access is determined by the towns, not by the NHAL master plan.

#### **Swimming:**

All nine existing swimming beaches would be maintained and a new swimming beach would be designated at the current Carrol Lake campground site. In addition, swimming is available at undesignated sites on most lakes.



### **Wild, Wilderness, Electric-Motor Only, and Public Non-Motor Lakes:**

The 900 lakes within the boundaries of the NHAL provide some of the property's most highly valued recreational opportunities. While many of the lakes on the NHAL provide motor boating opportunities, the lakes described in this section would provide a quiet, more remote experience. The 1982 Master Plan designated 19 wilderness lakes and 41 wild lakes. In addition, many lakes currently have no-motors or electric-motors only restrictions. The Preferred Alternative recommends 8 wilderness lakes, 45 wild lakes, 10 public non-motor lakes or springs, and 22½ electric-motor only lakes. The list of lake designations can be found in Appendix A. See Maps 4 and 5 for the existing and proposed lakes designations. Average acreages for the lakes in the 1982 plan were 76 acres for wild lakes and 46 acres for wilderness lakes. Under the Preferred Alternative, average acreages would be 25 acres for wild lakes and 50 acres for wilderness lakes.

The qualifications for wild and wilderness lakes have changed somewhat since 1982. The primary change is that both electric and gas motors will be prohibited on wild lakes. A wilderness lake must have an undeveloped shoreline and be at least ¼ mile from any road or motorized trail. Timber harvest would not occur within ¼ mile of a wilderness lake. A wild lake must also have an undeveloped shoreline but may have limited road access. Wild lakes have a 400 foot buffer without timber harvests or other vegetative management around the lake.

Wild and wilderness lakes were discussed in the NHAL Alternatives (January, 2002). A range of public comments were heard. Many people favored wild and wilderness lakes, while others feared losing motorized access to lakes. The NHAL Regional Analysis showed that lakeshore development in the region has increased rapidly. As tourism and development increase, the undeveloped lakes of the NHAL provide an increasingly rare recreation opportunity.

Due to the statewide policy change on wilderness and wild lake standards, several lakes are currently designated but do not meet the criteria for their continued designation. For example, Allequash Lake is designated a wild lake but has a boat ramp and combustion motor use on half the lake, and electric-motor only use on the other half. The Preferred Alternative recommends that Allequash Lake retain existing uses and no longer be a wild lake.

For lakes that used to be wild or wilderness lakes but would not be under the Preferred Alternative, their scenic, undeveloped shorelines would continue to be protected. In addition, protection of water quality is a priority for all lakes in the NHAL.

- Of the 19 existing wilderness lakes, 8 would continue to be wilderness lakes, 8 would become wild lakes, and 3 would be designated electric-only. The lakes that would no longer be wilderness lakes have roads within ¼ mile or conflicting uses.
- Of the 41 existing wild lakes, 15 would continue to be wild, 5½ are currently electric-only and would remain electric-only, 9½ currently allow all motors and would continue to allow all motors, 3 currently allow no motors and would be designated public non-motor, 7 would be newly restricted to electric-only, and one would be newly restricted to public non-motor. In addition, 22 new lakes would be designated wild under the Preferred Alternative.
- Two lakes that were electric-motor only would continue to be electric-motor only. Five lakes that currently allow all motors would become electric-motor only. Six lakes or springs that are currently no-motor would become public non-motor.

What's the difference between wilderness, wild, electric-motor only, and public non-motor lakes?

**Wilderness Lake** – a lake that provides a wilderness experience, with no motors (gas or electric) and a ¼ mile buffer without roads, timber harvesting, motorized trails, or other signs of human influence. Very occasional (about once every 5-10 years) use of motors is permitted for monitoring.

**Wild Lake** – a lake that provides a somewhat remote experience, with no motors (gas or electric) and a 400 ft buffer with no timber harvests. May have limited road access. Very occasional (about once every 5-10 years) use of motors is permitted for monitoring.

**Electric-Motor Only** – only battery power motors are allowed for public use on these lakes. All motors are permitted for management activities.

**Public Non-Motor** – a lake that provides a quiet recreation setting, with no use of motors (gas or electric) by the public, but regular motorized use permitted for management. Does not require an undeveloped shoreline.

## Trails

The NHAL will continue to offer a variety of designated trails. The phrase “designated trails” refers to trails that are set aside for only one or a few specific uses such as hiking or snowmobiling. In addition to designated trails, the NHAL offers hundreds of miles of woods roads open to hiking, biking, horse-back riding, and snowshoeing.

### **ATVs:**

An eight mile segment of ATV trail is being considered in the northwest corner of the NHAL (see Map 2: Preferred Alternative Recreation) pending additional assessment of its feasibility. This proposed trail may have the potential to create a regional ATV trail connection. Remaining challenges in the development of this trail include crossing private land, avoiding wetlands, and making connections to other trails. At this time, the WDNR is working together with other landowners and local and tribal governments to explore options for a regional trail connection. The proposed trail would link with Iron County trail and road routes in the Mercer area and have the potential to link with future trails on the Lac du Flambeau reservation and the existing trail system on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in Price County. (See Map 3: Regional Designated ATV Trails and Road Routes.) The proposed trail segment on the NHAL would primarily run on an abandoned railroad grade and an abandoned road. In one place, the trail would cross Highway 182 and form the southeast border of the Manitowish Peatlands Wild Resources Area in order to avoid crossing wetlands or requiring an additional bridge. The ATV trail through the NHAL would be open year-round with the exception of the spring and fall maintenance/rest periods. The portion of the ATV trail on the railroad grade is currently designated as a snowmobile trail. In the winter, this segment would be a shared snowmobile and ATV trail. According to Iron County figures, ATV use is typically much lower in the winter than in the summer. Under the Preferred Alternative, ATVs would continue to be prohibited from off-trail riding and using woods roads and other state forest trails in the NHAL. Some town governments allow ATV riding on town roads within the state forest, which is outside the scope of the NHAL Master Plan.

ATV riding has gained in popularity in Wisconsin over the past decade. Trail riding opportunities are available in areas surrounding the NHAL, particularly on the Iron County Forest and the Chequamegon Unit of the National Forest. The NHAL Alternatives (January, 2002) provided options for the NHAL from no ATV trails to several corridor trails within the forest. Public comments reflected intense opinions on both sides of the issue. In developing this proposal, the WDNR carefully reviewed the public comments, along with the regional analysis, data on growing demand for trails, and the designation of the NHAL as a state forest.

### **Bicycles:**

Paved trail biking: The Preferred Alternative proposes a new, paved Crystal-Muskie Campground biking loop. This path would connect to the existing paved Boulder Junction trail. (The community of Boulder Junction developed and maintains a highly popular, surfaced bike path that currently extends from Boulder Junction to the NHAL Crystal Lake Picnic Area and Campground.) In the future, the NHAL would maintain the option of cooperating with local communities in developing bike paths along highway rights-of-way through the forest. One proposed land use agreement is shown on Map 2: Preferred Alternative Recreation. This would be a biking trail partly along an abandoned railroad grade in Oneida County.

Mountain biking: The Preferred Alternative proposes developing one new mountain bike trail and closing two existing trails to mountain bikes. The Lumberjack, Madeline, McNaughton, and Shannon trails, which are designated state forest-operated mountain bike trails, would continue to be maintained under the Preferred Alternative. These trails total 39 miles and require a trail pass. The Razorback Ridges mountain bike trail is operated through a land use agreement with a private organization which would continue under the Preferred Alternative.

The new mountain bike trail would be a 10-20 mile trail with loops of different challenge levels. A portion of the trail would run on existing forest roads that are closed to cars and trucks and provide a wide surface suitable for biking. Another portion of the trail would be designed to provide a more challenging, narrow course in a hilly area. The new trail system would be located south of Hurrah Lake off Vandercook Road. This location is north of Big Arbor Vitae Lake in Vilas County (it does not appear on the recreation maps). By designating a new trail, the best available design standards can be employed to ensure minimal erosion from mountain bike use.

The Escanaba trail and most of the Raven trail are currently used by mountain bikes although they were not originally designed as mountain bike trails. (The Raven Nature Trail is currently closed to bikes.) Because Raven/Bucktrack and Escanaba trails were not designed for mountain bike use, they are experiencing some erosion, and increased use is expected to intensify this erosion in the future. The Preferred Alternative would close both the Escanaba and Raven/Bucktrack trails to bikes due to erosion problems.

Mountain biking opportunities on woods roads and snowmobile trails would continue to be abundant across the forest.

### **Hiking and Backpacking:**

The existing designated hiking trails (18.5 miles) would be maintained with an additional five mile trail proposed around Clear Lake. Many additional miles of day hiking opportunities would also continue to be offered on the forest on cross-country ski trails, nature trails, on the extensive woods road network, and off-trail throughout the forest. See the Education and Interpretation (page 15) for more information on existing and new nature trails.

A new 10 to 20 mile hiking trail system for backpacking is proposed. A number of primitive campsites would be located along the route. The trail would be located in either the Nixon Lake area or the Salsich and Siphon Springs area.

### **Horseback Riding:**

No change is proposed for horseback riding opportunities on the forest. While the NHAL does not manage designated equestrian trails, riding opportunities are abundant on the forest. Horses may be ridden on woods roads and undesignated trails. Horses are prohibited on designated nature, hiking, or mountain biking trails. Several public horse trails are maintained by clubs and other organizations on state forest land through land use agreements. One such trail, the Fort Wilderness Trail, is shown on Map 2 in the southeast portion of the NHAL.

### **Ski Trails:**

No change is proposed for cross-country ski trails. Seventy miles of designated cross-country ski trail are available on the NHAL. Four trails are currently groomed by the WDNR: the Raven Trail, Madeline Trail, McNaughton Trail, and Escanaba Trail. Other ski trails, including the Shannon Trail, Razorback Ridges, and the North Lakeland Discovery Center (formerly the Statehouse Lake Trail) are maintained by private organizations through agreements with the WDNR. Some small adjustments may be made to the Shannon and McNaughton Trails to avoid conflicts with town roads. Ungroomed ski trails include the Lumberjack Trail and the Powell Trail. Cross-country skiing in ungroomed areas is also available across most of the NHAL.

### **Snowshoe Trails:**

Snowshoeing is allowed everywhere on the forest, except on designated groomed cross country ski trails. In addition, the Preferred Alternative would designate and promote the use of Fallison Lake, North Trout Lake, Star Lake and the proposed Crystal Lake Nature Trails as ungroomed winter snowshoe trail routes. Powell and Lumberjack trails would continue to be open for snowshoeing. The new clear lake trail described under “hiking” would also be available for snowshoeing.



**Snowmobile Trails:**

The Preferred Alternative proposes *no-net-reduction* of the total snowmobile mileage on the forest. Strong efforts are made to keep the current trail system intact. A two-mile trail reroute around the proposed Bittersweet Lakes Area would result in a small net increase in snowmobile trail miles (see page 17). The proposed snowmobile route change is shown on Map 2. The expansion of the NHAL boundary up to the Michigan border (see the Proposed Boundary Expansion, page 63) could provide opportunities for new snowmobile trails, and could protect existing snowmobile trails from closure due to shifts in private property ownership.



Future changes or additions to the NHAL snowmobile system could be made for safety, to keep snowmobiles off roads, if routes across private lands are lost, if resource degradation develops, or if unacceptable user conflicts occur.

Currently the NHAL has an extensive 400-mile plus network of snowmobile trails that link state land with private and county snowmobile trails. Snowmobile trails within the NHAL are operated partly on state land and partly on private land, through land use agreements.

**Cycles, 4x4s, and other licensed motor vehicles (forest road access):**

No change is proposed for NHAL policy on use of street licensed motor vehicles. Licensed cycles, 4x4s, and other vehicles meeting street-legal requirements may operate on open NHAL roads (including logging roads) that are not bermed, gated or signed as closed. Access would generally remain the same as it is now, with many areas on the NHAL accessible by vehicles due to the abundance of town and forest roads.

Some forest roads are maintained open continuously, particularly where necessary for fire suppression. These permanent roads are maintained open unless there is evidence of resource degradation. State forests, including the NHAL, regularly open and close forest roads as needed to conduct prescribed management (typically timber harvests). Roads opened or constructed for management purposes are generally open to the public during the management period (one to two years) and a short time thereafter to allow access for firewood collection or other uses. Following this period they are closed by gating or berming. The same general miles are open to public vehicles across the forest over time, but in different locations. This variable condition represents the historic use availability for public and tribal access.

**Hunting and Trapping**

Due to the continuing management for diverse forest types on the state forest, including maintenance of significant amounts of younger forest habitats, the NHAL would continue to offer abundant opportunities for small and big game hunting and trapping. Hundreds of miles of logging roads and non-designated trails would continue to be open for hunting access by foot and motor vehicle. Non-motorized areas where one can seek a more remote, solitary walk-in hunting experience would be offered at approximately current levels. Hunting and trapping regulations are outside the scope of the NHAL Master Plan. The Property Goal (page 4) of providing a diversity of hunting, trapping, fishing, and wildlife viewing opportunities would be met under the Preferred Alternative.

## Education and Interpretation

The current education and interpretation programs on the NHAL would be expanded to meet growing demands. Presently the NHAL maintains four, self-guided interpretive trails (Fallison, Raven, North Trout, and Star Lake) ranging from ½ to 2½ miles, as well as the Manitowish River Canoe Trail. A rustic Nature Center exists in the Crystal-Muskie Campground complex. Interpretive programs are held by the NHAL naturalist at campgrounds throughout the summer. Educational programs are also offered at the North Lakeland Discovery Center, which is operated on the NHAL through a land use agreement (some programs have a fee). The programs and facilities described in this section help meet the Property Goal (page 4) of providing a variety of educational opportunities for state forest visitors.



The Preferred Alternative proposes the following new additions:

- A Forestry Awareness and Education Center. This new facility would offer opportunities to learn about sustainable forest management and the NHAL's natural resources, as well as interpret the natural and cultural history of Wisconsin's northern forests. It would also provide a range of other visitor center services. The Center would be developed in the next decade subject to funding availability in a location to be determined.
- Rustic outdoor seating for educational programs at the Crystal-Muskie Nature Center.
- A new 1 mile nature trail adjacent to the Crystal Lake interpretive building. This trail would have a disabled-access loop.
- A new summer use interpretive shelter in the Clear Lake Campground.
- A new 1 to 2 mile nature trail adjacent to the proposed Forestry Awareness Center. This trail would also have a disabled-access loop.



## Semi-Remote, Non-Motor, and Wild Resources Recreation Areas

The NHAL Alternatives presented a range of options for Wild Resources Areas and Semi-Remote Recreation Areas. Public opinion on these areas was mixed, with many people concerned about losing road and trail access to the NHAL. Others expressed an interest in remote areas for quiet, backcountry exploration. For the Preferred Alternative, the WDNR has worked to approximate much of the current opportunities and management for the NHAL while providing for some changes where appropriate. The Semi-Remote, Non-Motor, and Wild Resources Recreation Areas contribute to meeting the Property Goal (page 4) of protecting and enhancing wild resource values such as solitude, remoteness, and the sights and sounds of a natural environment.

The Preferred Alternative proposes one Wild Resources Area, two Semi-Remote Recreation Areas, and one Non-Motor Area. The previous 1982 NHAL Master Plan designated one wilderness area (the Manitowish Wilderness Area) and three wild areas (the Partridge-Nixon, Frank Lake, and Indian Creek Wild Areas). (See Map 1: Current Condition Recreation.) Under the new plan, "wild" and "wilderness" designations will not be used. The new "Wild Resources Area" designation is very similar to the previous "wilderness" designation. In Wild Resources Areas, motorized use is not allowed, and timber harvesting or other management activities are allowed only under exceptional circumstances such as restoration activities as described in the master plan. The Preferred Alternative recommends that the former Manitowish Wilderness Area be redesignated the Manitowish Wild Resources Area. The recreation

opportunities provided by the former Frank Lake and Partridge-Nixon Wild Areas would continue to be provided under the Preferred Alternative. These areas, with somewhat different boundaries, are redesignated the Frank Lake and Nixon Lake “Semi-Remote Recreation Areas.” These “Semi-Remote Recreation Areas” are designed to provide a semi-remote recreational setting but still allow for timber harvesting, some roads open to the public, and use of electric motors on lakes. In these areas, existing town roads and snowmobile trails would remain open. However, the woods roads which are almost entirely bermed or gated would remain closed, and no new recreational developments would be permitted. Timber harvesting and other management would continue in these areas according to the Land Management recommendations. Finally, the Bittersweet Lakes Area is proposed as a “Non-Motor Area.” In a Non-Motor area, motors would *not* be allowed for general public access, but forest management would continue according to Land Management recommendations. Open roads, snowmobile trails, or any motors on lakes would not be allowed in a Non-Motor area.

Discussion of wild and wilderness lakes can be found under Water-based Recreation (page 11).

## **Wild Resources Area**

### The Manitowish Wild Resources Area

The Manitowish Wild Resources Area (currently the Manitowish Wilderness Area) is located in the northwest corner of the NHAL. (See Map 1: Current Condition Recreation and Map 2: Preferred Alternative Recreation.) Wild Resources Areas provide remote, quiet, non-motorized recreation where natural ecological processes predominate and evidence of human impact is low. In the Preferred Alternative, this 6,150 acre area would continue to be maintained as it has been under the wilderness area designation, without motorized access or timber harvest. (See the Land Management section page 49.) Salvage after a disturbance would not occur. The Manitowish Wild Resources Area contains a remote stretch of the Manitowish River, which is surrounded by bogs, forested wetlands, and some upland areas. Several primitive canoe campsites would continue to be maintained along the river. Any picnic tables located at these sites would be removed due to the new standards for wild resources areas. Motor vehicle access would be restricted except to respond to health and safety or other emergencies. Restoration of old roads to a more natural-looking appearance would be authorized.

## **Semi-Remote and Non-Motor Recreation Areas**

### Nixon and Frank Lake Semi-Remote Recreation Areas

The previous 1982 master plan designated three “wild areas” on the NHAL. Two of these wild areas are the Partridge-Nixon (12,200 ac) and Frank Lake (9,600 ac) Wild Areas. (See Map 1: Current Condition Recreation.) These have been managed for remote, quiet recreation while allowing some roads and snowmobile trails. Under the Preferred Alternative, these areas would be designated the Nixon Lake and Frank Lake “Semi-Remote Recreation Areas” rather than wild areas. The boundaries of areas were changed somewhat to better meet their designations. The proposed Nixon Lake Semi-Remote Recreation Area contains about 13,500 acres, and the proposed Frank Lake Semi-Remote Recreation Area contains about 6,800 acres. (See Map 2: Preferred Alternative Recreation.)

The main objective of the Semi-Remote Recreation Areas is to provide a somewhat remote recreation experience similar to the experience currently provided in most parts of the “wild areas.” Public access in the proposed Semi-Remote Recreation Areas would be the same as today (allowing for existing town roads and snowmobile trails), but combustion motors would not be allowed on lakes in these areas. Several popular lakes that allow combustion motors were removed from the boundaries, including Allequash Lake, Partridge Lake, and Nebish Lake. The Starrett Lake campground was also removed. Public motorized use would be limited, but the use of motor vehicles for WDNR authorized management activities or contract operations would be permitted.

The existing “wild areas” designations limit timber harvest somewhat. The Semi-Remote Recreation Areas, however, would apply only to recreational access and do not determine land management activities. Active and passive forest management would be used in different parts of these areas in order to carry out restoration and other management goals described in the Land Management section. In the Semi-Remote Recreation Areas, any roads opened for timber harvests would remain gated to public access, as is currently the case for the wild areas. Land management in former wild areas is described on page 27.

#### Bittersweet Lake Non-Motor Area

The Bittersweet Lake area was identified in the NHAL Alternatives as a potential area for providing quiet recreation year-round. This 2,000 acre area was identified by NHAL staff and public participants as having scenic value, and by the CROG and Biotic Inventory as having special ecological significance. It contains a complex of undeveloped lakes (Bittersweet, Prong, Oberlin, and Smith Lakes) surrounded by mixed northern hardwood forests. (See Map 2: Preferred Alternative Recreation.) In the Preferred Alternative, this area would be managed as a Non-Motor Area. Roads to the lakes would be closed to public motor vehicles but open to foot traffic, bicycles, and horses. A small parking lot would be developed to serve as an access point for the area. The lakes would be designated wild lakes, and provide opportunities for canoeing or fishing from non-motorized boats. Several new wilderness campsites would be developed along lakeshores for people seeking quiet recreation fairly close to the Minocqua-Woodruff area. A two mile stretch of snowmobile trail would be rerouted about one mile to the east to form the eastern boundary of the area. Forest management would proceed according to objectives described in the Land Management section. The Land Management section (page 47) explains that much of the Bittersweet Lakes area would be passively managed to carry out restoration and other management goals. Public motorized use in this area would be prohibited but the use of motor vehicles for WDNR authorized management activities or contract operations would be permitted. See page 8 for information on accommodations for people with disabilities.

#### Removal of the Indian Creek Wild Area Designation

The Indian Creek Wild Area (7,000 ac) would not have a recreation designation in the Preferred Alternative because it provides low recreation opportunity. This area is mainly bog with some upland areas dominated by jack pine. It would be managed as part of the Rainbow Wetlands Management Unit for protection of the wetland areas and management of the upland areas. Recreation opportunities in this area would be similar to the current condition. Only existing recreational facilities and trails would be permitted.

### **Other Recreational Activities**

In addition to the more formal or recognized forms of recreation and sport that people participate in on the NHAL State Forest, a variety of other activities occur. These range from simple walking for pleasure and berry picking, to wildlife viewing, nature study, birding, nature photography, writing, sketching, painting, scuba & skin diving, dog training, and orienteering with map, compass or electronic GPS units. These opportunities would continue to be available on the NHAL.

Land Use Agreements: The WDNR has a long history of cooperation with private organizations to manage and maintain recreational facilities. Land use agreements include the Razorback Ridges trail area, the North Lakeland Discovery Center, over 400 miles of snowmobile trails on the NHAL, several youth camps, and many smaller trail systems. Land use agreements on the NHAL would continue to be evaluated periodically.

Three shooting ranges also exist on the NHAL through land use agreements with private operators. Establishing public shooting ranges has been a WDNR objective in the interest of wildlife, the sport of hunting, and public safety. The shooting ranges are located near the intersection of Hwy 51 and Hwy M, near Mercer, and near Boulder Junction.